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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Summer is officially over but the weather continues to be terrific. The leaves are turning and peak colors are closing in on New England. When I'm done watching the leaves turn, I'm ready for the clean-up! It's been too much of a chore to rake up the tons of leaves we end up with so I recently purchased a yard vacuum which vacuums the leaves and mulches them. Included with this tool is a chipper so I can grind up small branches at the same time! All I have to do is operate it much like I do a lawnmower. And when that's all down, I'm ready for the inevitable snowfall with a new snowthrower! I don't think my back will survive another winter of shovelling.

It's been a hectic week around here. It's been difficult to sit down and think because the town is putting in sewer systems for much of the town residents that still use septic systems. They're on my street now, and were digging up the street in front of my house tonight. No water, plenty of noise, and the dogs were going crazy!

Last week's editorial got some reaction from a couple of readers. I had planned to include at least one of those responses with some of my own additional comments, but I'll get to that next week when I'll likely be able to hear myself think again! The readers brought up some interesting points which I'd like to share.

Until next time...

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New Drawing Contest

We're happy to announce the sponsorship from a local gift shop, allowing MagiC Online (http://www.magical-sides.de), already one of the premiere Atari sites on the Internet, to hold weekly and semi-weekly competitions. The contests are short and fun - designed to bring the community together and showcase some of the talent we have on this platform.

First Contest:

It’s almost Halloween, so the first contest will have a spooky theme.

The challenge: Draw a "scary" picture with an Atari theme. It could be a picture of a boy trick-and-treating wearing an Atari shirt, a spooky floating Fuji symbol, an Atari computer in flames, or any other creepy image you can think of. Use your imagination, and have fun!

The prize for this week’s contest:

Cyber Chuck

It’s not easy to keep up with technology. Just ask Charlie Brown. When it comes to the information superhighway...well, let’s just say he’s in the slow lane. Which is not to say that he doesn’t keep trying. We are talking about Charlie Brown, here. For your favorite cyberspace fan › a fun look at our favorite cyberspace traveler. (Porcelain figurine sculpted by Anita Marra Rogers.)

Dimensions: 3 5/8" high.

A certificate of authenticity accompanies this Hallmark Keepsake Collections Numbered Edition. Carefully crafted from the very finest materials, this heirloom-quality piece was designed to be treasured for years to come.

Rules

Pictures may be created by traditional means (pencil, paper etc) and scanned, or can be created completely digitally.

All pictures must be your own work!

Submissions must be sent to support@magical-sides.de by Monday Oct. 15

Submission of picture means you agree to MagiC Online using your work in promotional or site-related material.

That’s it! The executive (static) staff of MagiC Online will judge who the winner is, and the first prize winner will be sent the prize. Remember, this contest is to have fun, so make sure to!

Contest page: http://www.magical-sides.de/contests.html

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. With "leaf-peaking" season just around the corner, the first frost come and gone, and my back stiffening up, the fact that fall is here and winter is just around the corner is undeniable.

I much prefer the autumn to summer. Moderate temperatures are only a part of it. Living in the northeast, I'm accustomed to actually seeing and feeling the change of seasons. The leaves changing color and falling from the trees reminds me that there is a time for just about everything. The same trees that were busy doing the "green" thing during the spring are now dropping their leaves and getting ready to rest for a while.

There are a lot of people who don't agree with me about the "best" season. Some prefer the sports of summer or winter, and for some the rapid growth of spring is a sign that all is well with the world.

And the fact that we can all see things differently is really a great thing. It keeps us all from being the same. I've usually chosen that proverbial road less travelled, and it's worked out pretty well for me.

What we've got to keep remembering is that either we're all allowed to be different, or none of us will be. While some may find comfort in conformity, it's a hollow comfort that's usually short-lived.

So the very next chance you get, do something your own way. Then you'll be just like me! <smile>

Okay, let's get on with the news and stuff from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Paul Williamson asks for help with a dead monitor:

"One of my SM124 monitors just went blank the other day. It was being used on an STe but I know the computer's O.K. as it works fine with a spare monitor.

The only clue is that the power LED on the front is very dim, in fact it seems to fade (but stay on) shortly after power-up, and the screen stays dark. Any chance this might be a simple one-component repair, or does it sound fairly disastrous, like maybe the tube blown?"

Dave Smith tells Paul:

"If you have a SM124 made by Goldstar, which has the brightness, contrast and off/on volume recessed on the right side of the monitor, the most likely cause is blown capacitor(s). Just look for the burned, brown colored circuit board. This also means you have a blown fuse or two. The capacitors and fuses can be replaced, soldering required. "

Jim DeClercq adds:

"That is a new one on me, I think. I have fixed a bunch of them, and have a lot of spares.

I, personally, would check the rectifier diode bridge, since you may be getting half-wave rectification. I would replace all the diodes, since on of those 120 volt diodes on 20 volt service failed, and caused me to rewind the power transformer twice, by hand.

And while I was in there, I would replace the flyback timing 2.2 uf unpolarized capacitor, which can cause flyback failure. I made up a 2.2 uf out of plastic capacitors, which are unpolarized, and electrical tape to make them into a bundle. Soldered long leads to the bottom of the original holes, and tossed the bundle up under the bottom of the tube.

The tube is not a big problem, if you know of a tube rebuilder. The sm124 design started out life as a NCR bank machine monitor, and tube rebuilders have a lot of spare guns. So, for that matter, did the SM1224 and there might be guns for those.

So, even if only one component has failed, I would replace at least five, before putting the case back on.

Yes, does sound like half wave rectification. Get better rating diodes than the ones in there, which are pretty good at it is."

Djordje Vukovic adds his thoughts:

"If the LED barely works, it looks as if the power-supply is not delivering proper voltages. So it could be a power-supply malfunction, but locating the faulty component may not be obvious.

Otherwise, some other component (an electrolytic capacitor?) has burned horribly and is practically shorting the power-supply. See if you can find a blown capacitor inside (probably looking swollen instead of normal cylindrical shape). Also, look for a component which is very hot or maybe it even burned (yellowed) the PCB.

ATTENTION! lethal voltages can remain in the monitor even after it has been disconnected from the mains."

Bill Freeman joins in:

"There is one electrolytic on the power supply that typically fails. As I recall its a 2.2 mfd 50v non-polarized capacitor. It should look burned and leaking some black stuff if thats the problem."

Djirdje Vukovic tells Bill:

"There is indeed a 2.2 uF nonpolarized electrolytic capacitor in SM124 which typically fails, but it is not in the power supply - it is in the horizontal stage. It is best to replace it with a non-electrolytic type."

Quin Smith asks for some software help:

"I’d be very pleased if anyone could instruct me on how to use software found on the net on an atari computer. The software in question is an editor for the Yamaha tg500 sound module. I think its called ’take 500’. I don’t have a PC but have access to one at university. At home i have an Atari STe midi’d up to a Yamaha tg500. The problem is that the Atari doesn’t read the software i’ve downloaded at university. Do i need some kind of conversion?. It’s the same problem i have with sound samples for my Emu 6400 sampler, it doesn’t read the wav. files that i download through the internet, i should imagine i need some kind of conversion for this as well. If anyone can help, it would be great but bare in mind that i am a novice when it comes to using PCs."

Bob Retelle tells Quin:

"You can download files with a PC and transfer them to your Atari with no "conversion" needed.

BUT-

Your Atari will NOT read a "normal" PC floppy disk.

You need to format a floppy disk ON THE PC, but you must format it as a 720K disk.

Go to "My Computer" on the desktop and Double Left Click on the icon.

Put a floppy disk in the floppy drive and Single RIGHT Click on the Floppy Drive Icon (usually marked A:)

Single Left Click on "Format..." on the menu that drops down.

Under "Capacity" at the top of the box which opens, click on the downward pointing arrow then click on "720Kb (3.5")"

Click on the button marked "Start" in the same box.

This will format the floppy so the Atari can read it. Copy your files onto this disk and try it in the Atari."

Mike Rhodes asks for help with hard drive software:

"I am firing up my old ST again and would like to change the old 20 meg HD. I don't have a formatting/partitioning program for a larger drive. Can anybody supply one?"

Antonis Keramidas tells Mike:

"There's "AHDI" Atari's original Hard Disk Utilities.You can download it at http://www.umich.edu/~archive/atari/Diskutils/.
A newer and better alternative is HDDriver,it's the best of all but it is commercial...a DEMO at http://www.seimet.de/index.html"

Hallvard Tangeraas asks about his new hard drive:

"I finally got my Plextor 12/20 CD-ROM drive today and wanted to try it out with my Mega STe, but I'm having some (hopefully minor) problems.

I'm using HDdriver (version 6.13) together with Metados and Spin! drivers for the CD-ROM drive. I've got the following files in the AUTO folder (in this order):

SCSIDRV.PRG
METADOS.PRG

Furthermore I have the two drivers in the AUTO folder as well:

ISO9660F.DOS
SPIN_SD.BOS

And of course the configuration file:

CONFIG.SYS

Which I've edited as follows:

```
 ; Example configuration for SPIN!

 ; CD-ROMs on ACSI 1
 *BOS, c:\auto\spin_sd.bos, A:1

 ; Install as logical drive X:
 *DOS, c:\auto\iso9660f.dos, X:A
```

The Mega STe has an internal SCSI hard disk with SCSI ID 0, while the CD-ROM drive is connected via an ICD Link II to the ACSI port. It's set to SCSI ID 1 and has parity switched on.
I've assigned it as drive X on the TOS desktop.

What happens is that when I double click the "drive X" icon on the desktop, the busy bee shows up for two seconds, then nothing else happens. At this point I would expect the contents of the CD to show up (and yes, the CD should be readable by the computer as I've tried it before, with an old Apple 2x drive).

I've checked the ID with IDCHECK.APP (part of the HDdriver package) and it definitely shows up at ID 1 ("ACSI 1.0 Plextor CD-ROM PX-20TS 1.01 CD-ROM").

What may I have missed here? Could it be that even though the computer recognizes the unit, it's not fully compatible with the Link II?
I seem to recall something about "initiator identification", "arbitration" or whatever technical terms I'm not too familiar with. Could it be that this unit has one of those features and this be the reason for my problems?

I'll be receiving a Link 97 in a little while, so that'll let me figure that part out for sure, but I'm still a little puzzled as to why the drive shows up in the mentioned SCSI ID display program as well as when booting up (HDdriver and MetaDos), but still can't be accessed.
I don't know if this helps figuring out how/why, but upon booting the following information shows up:

```
 SPIN! /SD 0.34
 ACSI 1.9: PLEXTOR CD_ROM PX-20TS  1.01 (XHDI)
SPIN! /SD 0.34 installed as A: on ACSI 1.
ISO9660F v2.70 driver installed as X:.
```

I'm a little concerned about the mention of "A:" as I'm not sure if this is being referred to as the "A:" within Spin! or the usual "drive A:" within TOS. I suspect it to be the former, but I could be wrong.
I have tried double-clicking the "drive A" icon, but as expected this reads the floppy disk drive.

Oh... regarding the CD-ROM drive -there are two LEDs on the front panel. One is labelled "Disc" which I've never seen lit up, the other is marked "On/busy" and is lit up constantly with an orange LED. Should this LED be unlit when the CD isn't accessed?"

Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver tells Hallvard:

"[It's not an initiator issue,] because in this case the drive would not have been recognized at all.

A has a different meaning for SPIN! [as opposed to Floppy A]. Please refer to the SPIN! documentation for details."

Lyndon Amsdon adds:

"Have you tried using a different letter to A? I use X and Y (I have 2 CD-ROMs) but I imagine that would conflict with your logical drive letter. I've never understood the letter that links the two, something to do with GEMDOS or something."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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Keeper of the Flame
by Thomas J. Andrews
tj@atarinews.org

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - "Looney Tunes Sheep Raider"!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Microsoft, Sega Alliance?
Celebrity 'SSX Tricky'!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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THQ To Publish ''Dark Summit" On Nintendo GameCube

THQ Inc. announced plans to publish ''Dark Summit," the first ever mission-based snowboarding title, on Nintendo GameCube.

The game is scheduled to release in the first quarter of 2002 and will be the first action-adventure snowboarding title available for the new system.

Developed by Radical Entertainment Ltd., ''Dark Summit" will immerse

GameCube owners in a completely unique experience. ‘‘Dark Summit" is the very first action-adventure snowboarding game that features an in-depth story line and a series of mission-based objectives. As the game’s main character Naya, a rebellious female snowboarder, players will encounter a variety of diverse challenges such as escaping an angry ski patrol, jumping gaps and performing death-defying, high-flying maneuvers.

With more than 45 challenges on massively sized runs, players must earn points to reach the top of the mysterious summit. It will take every ounce of strategy and skill to defeat the crafty Chief O’Leary, who will stop at nothing to protect Mt. Garrick’s secret.

‘‘Nintendo GameCube will be a major focus for THQ in 2002," said Brian Farrell, Chairman, President and CEO, THQ. ‘‘An original title such as ’Dark Summit,’ with its revolutionary game design, will be a welcome addition to the software library of the system’s early adopters."

‘‘Dark Summit" takes place on Mt. Garrick, a once quiet and peaceful ski resort where snowboarders have never felt welcome. Chief O’Leary has led the charge against boarders and limited their access to certain sections of the mountain. Now he has mysteriously closed the summit to all boarders and is trying desperately to drive them off the mountain altogether. Gamers will shred and jib their way through this suspected conspiracy on several massive runs. As Naya, players will work to earn lift and equipment points to unlock restricted areas of the mountain in order to discover the true secret behind ‘‘Dark Summit."

Infogrames’ Puts Players in Beloved Looney Tunes Cartoon For a Totally Unique Interactive Game Play Experience

It’s the age-old battle between Looney Tunes memorable adversaries Ralph Wolf and Sam Sheep-dog in Infogrames Inc.’s, Looney Tunes Sheep Raider for the PlayStation video game console that ships to most major retail stores this week.

As ‘‘anti-hero" Ralph Wolf, players use devious and mischievous, mission-based tactics in order to pull the wool over Sam Sheep-dog’s eyes and rustle his flock. Plenty of hilarious, inventive ACME gadgets are employed -- rocket packs, umbrellas, catapults, sheep costumes, sheep perfume, and more -- as Ralph Wolf devises ever-cleverer schemes to capture his sheeply prey.

‘‘Looney Tunes Sheep Raider captures the unique and quirky feel of the Looney Tunes cartoons," says Nancy MacIntyre, vice president of marketing for Infogrames’ Beverly Label. ‘‘PlayStation owners who enjoy strategy-based games, but with a humorous twist, are going to find this game totally fresh -- a real stand-out in the genre. We have included many of the outlandish ACME gags that made these cartoons so much fun, and players will be challenged to employ them to accomplish their sheep-snatching missions."

In Looney Tunes Sheep Raider players must poach sheep in more than 15 levels with diverse environments. Terrain like volcanoes, deserts, swamps and scary castles provide Ralph Wolf with tons of exciting challenges. Ralph must combine and use over 25 gadgets to capture his dinner. Ralph Wolf has the ability to hide, sneak, jump, swim, creep and fly to cleverly

pursue his prey. In addition, special appearances by Foghorn Leghorn, Daffy Duck, Porky Pig, and many more legendary characters make this game a treat for any Looney Tunes fan.

Developed by Infogrames' Lyon House, Looney Tunes Sheep Raider has an ESRB rating 'E' for Everyone and is currently available at most major retail outlets for an estimated retail price of $19.99.

Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. Announces 'NBA Jam 2002' for Game Boy Advance

Dishing-off above the rim NBA action into the hands of gamers, Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. announced the launch of NBA JAM 2002 for Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. Scheduled for release this holiday season, NBA JAM 2002 will feature high-flying basketball action, complete with outrageous slam dunks, special powerups, all 29 official NBA teams, more than 140 superstars and authentic courts.

''Having sold more than six million units worldwide, NBA JAM is one of the most beloved and successful video game franchises in the history of the interactive entertainment industry," said Steve Felsen, Senior Director of Brand. ''We are pleased to continue our successful relationship with the NBA and expand upon our next-generation hand-held lineup for this holiday season."

Developed by Digital Creations, NBA JAM 2002 brings the hottest hardwood action to the handheld community, offering an array of exciting features, including:

-- Official NBA licensed product, including all 29 teams and courts;

-- More than 140 NBA superstars;

-- Traditional NBA JAM 2-on-2 arcade action;

-- Two new ''Jam-style" courts, including Beach and Street Jam;

-- Return of Fun Mode, with player Hotspots, Hangtime, Half Court Superdunks and On Fire;

-- Signature and special player moves, including alley-oops, sky hooks and off-the-glass passes;

-- Various modes of play, such as Practice, Season, Playoffs, Jam Style, Head-to-Head and the all-new ''Horse" mode;

-- Unlock secret teams, such as the NBA Rookie Team, East and West All-Star Teams, and the All-NBA Team;

-- Tons of hidden cheat codes and surprises.

NBA JAM 2002 will be available this holiday season for Nintendo's Game Boy Advance at a suggested retail price of $39.99.

Celebrities Join EA SPORTS BIG as Characters in

SSX Tricky

Lucy Liu, Oliver Platt and David Arquette Headline the Star-Studded Cast for SSX Tricky

Electronic Arts announced that SSX Tricky, the latest title from the EA SPORTS BIG brand, will integrate the voices and personalities of top celebrities from film, music and the performing arts into the characters in the eagerly anticipated follow up to SSX, the critically-acclaimed and top-selling original video game for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system. Lucy Liu (Charlie’s Angels), Oliver Platt (Lake Placid) and David Arquette (Scream) are just a few who will contribute their vocal personalities to original characters in SSX Tricky. Terms of the agreements were not disclosed.

‘‘I love to play video games myself, but not having done this before I really didn’t know what to expect," said Oliver Platt. ‘‘I just took what was on the page and tried to make it as big and stupid as possible." Platt continued, ‘‘I don’t actually snowboard, but I guess I do now. Who knows, maybe after playing SSX Tricky it’ll be automatic."

Joining Liu, Platt and Arquette are Grammy-winner Macy Gray, actor Billy Zane (Titanic), actress Patricia Velazquez (The Mummy Returns), performance artist Jim Rose (The Jim Rose Circus) and alternative music recording artist Bif Naked.

‘‘I love video games," said Macy Gray. ‘‘Now that I’m a video game character I feel like I’ve made it, I’ve finally arrived."

The celebrity voice-overs will be incorporated into each characters pre-race, in-race and post-race dialogue. In addition, their real-life counterparts inspire the personalities and look of the celebrity-voiced characters in SSX Tricky.

All the voice-recording sessions were video taped and will be used for a ‘‘behind the scenes" feature included on the SSX Tricky DVD disc. Here, players will be able to see the celebrity talent as they’re recording their dialogue and obtain exclusive interviews and insight from the personalities behind the riders, all on the same DVD disc as the SSX Tricky game.

‘‘We are excited we secured such a tremendous cast of talent to work on SSX Tricky," said executive producer Steven Rechtschaffner. ‘‘We believe these personalities, each with their own attitude and style, will make the riders more compelling and the story of SSX Tricky deeper, bringing players back for a unique gaming experience every time."

SSX for the PlayStation 2 is the top selling original title for the PlayStation 2, as of September 2001, according to TRST Data. SSX has not only enjoyed retail success, but it bowled over the game industry media as well, demonstrated by more than 12 interactive entertainment industry award nominations for 2000, including a nomination for the Blockbuster Entertainment Award for PlayStation 2 ‘‘Game of the Year." SSX garnered five awards from the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences including Console Game of the Year and Sports Games of the Year. SSX won ‘‘Game of the Year" from PSM and ‘‘PlayStation 2 Game of the Year" from PSE2 Magazine and received Germany’s Gamespot.de Gold Award amongst other international nominations.

SSX Tricky will be available this winter on the PlayStation 2 console, the

Xbox video game system from Microsoft and the Nintendo GameCube.

SSX Tricky utilizes DVD media that allows for additional content including a new ‘‘DVD-like" 3D front end, as well as exclusive behind the scenes footage from voice recording sessions to off the mountain interaction between the riders. New tracks, environments and configurations allow riders to pump up their trick repertoire. SSX Tricky also features new music from the cutting edge world of electronic breaks and beats cut by such turntable all-stars as Mix Master Mike of the Beastie Boys, The Plump DJ’s and others. SSX Tricky will be available on the PlayStation 2, Nintendo GameCube, and the Xbox in winter 2001.

Microsoft to Broaden Ties with Sega

U.S. software giant Microsoft Corp unveiled on Friday an extended alliance with Japanese game developer Sega Corp ahead of the U.S. company’s closely awaited launch of its game console Xbox next month.

The Xbox represents Microsoft’s push into the $20 billion video game industry now dominated by Japan’s Sony Corp and Nintendo Co Ltd, which also are marketing advanced 128-bit game consoles.

Under the agreement, Sega will provide a new game in its hit Shenmue series exclusively for the Xbox in the North American market and it will make a new game in its popular Phantasy Star Online series for the Xbox.

The extended alliance will add more firepower to the arsenal of Xbox, which is set to hit shelves on November 15 in the United States, followed by a February 22 launch in Japan.

The two companies will also work together to develop a motherboard based on Xbox technology for arcade game machines and to create new online PC games in North America.

‘‘We will join forces to boost our broadband online game business for both PCs and game consoles by combining our expertise," Sega Chief Operating Officer Tetsu Kayama told a news conference at Tokyo Game Show which started on Friday.

The extended alliance was unveiled as concerns emerged about the U.S. Christmas shopping season after attacks on New York and Washington, but a Microsoft official played down the worries.

‘‘We cannot deny any terror impact, but I don’t think it would be huge," Hirohisa Oura, managing director of Microsoft’s Japanese subsidiary, told Reuters in an interview on Friday.

‘‘After the attacks, I think people will be eager to express their love for family and friends and they are going to be in a greater gift-giving mood," he said.

Xbox had the biggest booth in the Game Show, setting up 150 Xbox consoles to give die-hard gamers a chance to try its 128-bit online-capable box.

High hopes are riding on new entrant Xbox among software makers as the Japanese gaming industry suffers sluggish consumer demand.

But uncertainty about the global economic outlook overshadowed the show and the number of participating companies declined to 53 this year from 63 a year ago. The Computer Entertainment Software Association also said on Friday the semi-annual game show would only be held once next year.

‘‘I have to say the game show this year lacks a punch, it seems to be losing momentum," said Koki Ishimoto, an official of software maker Koei Co Ltd

For Sega, known for its ‘‘Sonic The Hedgehog" game character, the alliance is part of its effort to become the world’s No.1 game software maker.

‘‘The additional collaboration with Microsoft is aimed to boost our sales and to help Xbox lure Japanese game users," Masanao Maeda, Sega’s senior officer, told Reuters.

‘‘But this doesn’t mean that we will put special focus on Xbox. PlayStation 2 will remain our main platform because it is likely to be the best-selling machine for a while."

Sega, which makes games for Sony’s PlayStation2 and Nintendo’s GameCube consoles as well as for PCs and mobile phones, also said on Friday that it would start offering an online soccer game for mobile phones, which would enable players in Japan and Korea to play against each other.

Sega’s Kayama said that the company aims to sell 35 million games in 2003/04, up from its goal of 15 million this year.

‘‘Given the fast progress of our game development activities, we now expect that we can sell around 15 million game units this year, some 20 percent higher than our initial goal of 12.7 million," Kayama said.

The Tokyo-based company abandoned the game machine market earlier this year because of poor sales of its Dreamcast console, shifting efforts to its healthier software business.

Sega is in the midst of restructuring under which it aims to return to profit in the 2001/02 business year and to raise return on equity to more than 15 percent in 2003/04.

‘‘By promoting our multiplatform strategy, we aim to become the world’s number one game software maker," Kayama said.

Some analysts, however, voiced concerns.

‘‘The 15 million sales figure was just their goal, not the revised forecast as Kayama also said some game titles may come later than in the original plan," said Takashi Oka, chief analyst at Tsubasa Research Institute.

‘‘Before anything, we need to see whether the company can keep its promise on their interim earnings since the company has disappointed us many times in the past."

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The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Cyber Security Key to New U.S Initiative

Federal and other officials say that cyber security will be a key component of the new Office of Homeland Security -- but some computer security experts worry that more bureaucracy will bog down protection.

While the man named to head the new office, former Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge, has a history of tapping technology for public policy issues, there is concern over his ability to coordinate some 40 agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

And although officials as high as the President of the United States stress the value of secure information in the war on terrorism, industry experts doubt that government can cut through the red tape to protect the Internet.

"I think there's a big need [for cyber security], but I'm not sure the way the government is going about it will really have much effect," SecurityFocus incident analyst Ryan Russell told NewsFactor Network. "I think we're a long way off from being secure. The best we can do is act responsively, and I don't see that changing for at least the next decade."

There has been some skepticism that a new Office of Homeland Security is the best way to address the kinds of security gaps that allowed September's hijackers to slip through the system, and to prevent future attacks, including on the Web. But at Ridge's swearing in on Monday, President George W. Bush said the new office has his weight behind it.

"The Homeland Security Office has a series of specific goals, and will have my authority to meet them," the President said. "One, take the strongest possible precautions against terrorism by bringing together the best information and intelligence. In the war on terror, knowledge is power."

While it is still taking shape, the "homeland defense" initiative also includes a new deputy national security adviser who will coordinate anti-terrorism efforts of the National Security Council, which now includes an Office of Cyber Security.

Still, security experts like Russell say that cyber security problems center on the need for system administrators, not federal administrators.

"It looks like most of the problems out there have to do with bodies to do the work," he told NewsFactor.

Russell, who recalled a two-day authority delay when he was asked to look at a government agency server, said officials typically focus too much on "penetration testing" to find out whether systems are vulnerable, leaving the same security holes year after year.

"They're finding gaping, massive holes and keep coming back and finding the same problems over and over again," he said. "You never can tell what's going to result, but I'm skeptical based on the past."

Russell did say that the terrorist attacks may have changed the mindsets of government officials and large software makers like Microsoft, putting a new priority on security.

"They seem to be acknowledging there is a systemic problem," Russell said, adding that government is a large user of Microsoft products and has the same security problems as other users of the popular software.

Speaking at the White House on Monday, Ridge -- who has made deals with Microsoft, Unisys and other technology companies while governor of Pennsylvania -- indicated a need to bring together the various federal, state and local agencies involved in securing everything from local highways to the information superhighway. He added that candor and cooperation would be the driving principle for the new office.

"The President's executive order states that we must detect, prepare for, prevent, protect against, respond to and recover from terrorist attacks -- an extraordinary mission," Ridge said. "But we will carry it out."

Low Demand Kills Online Anonymity, Encryption Services

Citing low demand and no connection to terrorist attacks last month, Zero-Knowledge Systems said it is discontinuing its premium anonymity and encryption services to focus on its mass-market Freedom Privacy and Security Tools 3.0, which was released Thursday.

The company said the few users who opted for the premium service -- which operated on the Montreal, Canada-based company's "Freedom Network" -- will no longer be able to receive e-mail as of October 11th. The majority of Freedom servers will be taken offline and users will no longer be able to send e-mail after October 22nd, the company said.

"This decision was not taken lightly," said Zero-Knowledge executive vice president and chief operating officer Hamnett Hill in a letter to Freedom Network users. "It reflects the ongoing high cost and limited returns of operating the Freedom Network -- the engine that drives the encryption and anonymity process."

Zero-Knowledge spokesman Dov Smith told NewsFactor Network that the company had been working with focus groups, computer makers and others to find out what the average user wants in terms of safety and protection on the Internet.

"Increasingly, we're finding it's not the network services like encryption and anonymity that we offer in our premium package," Smith said. "The mass market is not looking for encryption and anonymity. The mass market, the family of four, the new computer user, is looking for something else."

The company says it will focus instead on the latest version of Freedom Privacy and Security Tools 3.0, which offers a personal firewall, form filler/password manager, cookie manager and ad manager. The suite also includes keyword alert, which scans outbound communications for sensitive and private information, Zero-Knowledge says.

The September 11th terrorist attacks have fueled the debate over Internet encryption and anonymity, which many speculate are common elements in

communication among terrorists. However, Smith told NewsFactor that the company had planned its new product and the end of its premium services long before the devastating assaults.

"This product design preceded those tragic events, and there’s absolutely no connection whatsoever," Smith said.

Following the attacks, some lawmakers drew sharp criticism from technology companies after proposing a requirement that encryption software makers provide government agencies with keys for decoding messages.

Smith said the heated debates over encryption, anonymity and their use by terrorists has become a non-issue for his company, as it no longer deals with those technologies.

However, the Zero-Knowledge spokesman did indicate that the company had a relationship with law enforcement while facilitating the Freedom Network.

"While we had the network, we had a very cordial relationship with law enforcement," Smith said. "In the entire time we offered encryption and anonymity, it was really minimally abused from our perspective."

Anonymizer president Lance Cottrell, who said his company is seeing strong demand for encryption and anonymity tools, told NewsFactor that Anonymizer also works with law enforcement. However, he does not favor a government repository for encryption keys.

"Obviously, strong encryption in source code format is widely distributed across the world," Cottrell said. "So there’s no law you can make today that will take iron-clad, military-strength encryption out of people’s hands."

"You can make a law that takes it away from the average user, but that’s not right," he added.

Enhancing Security: Can the Internet Help?

Given the many Internet security breaches that have occurred this past year, from Code Red to the Nimda virus, many are wondering whether -- and how -- the Internet can help in thwarting future incidents or aiding in rescue and recovery efforts.

In the aftermath of September’s cataclysmic events in New York and Washington, the Internet aided mostly through its ability to help find missing persons and to connect others to agencies that were assisting in recovery efforts, such as the Red Cross.

Ryan Russell, incident analyst for Internet security company SecurityFocus, told NewsFactor Network that his group heard many reports of ways the Internet and other communications were employed in the immediate aftermath of the World Trade Center attack.

"Some people with cell phones were able to call from areas where they were trapped," Russell told NewsFactor. "Some in the New York area, where phone service was overwhelmed, were able to use e-mail and instant messaging to contact family and friends to let them know they were okay. The [Internet’s] uses for a rescue and coordination effort are apparent."

Additionally, the Internet served as a sort of nationwide and global forum, where people could exchange opinions on the conflict, express their sentiments and discuss ways of avoiding future incidents.

The FBI and law enforcement have also been investigating e-mail correspondence that might have had some bearing on the attacks on the assumption that at least some of the planning and organization was communicated through online means.

But what role will the Internet play in future conflicts? Can the Internet have an impact in preventing future assaults, online or physical?

Russell says that the Internet could be used in a preventive manner, most obviously for monitoring.

"Terrorists use the Internet as a communications medium, just like anyone else would, [allowing] law enforcement [to] monitor their communication to determine plans," said Russell. "The FBI is preparing to release their top 22 wanted terrorists list, [which] should provide a base of people to monitor."

Russell added, however, that while most privacy advocates aren’t too keen on such potential mass surveillance, "narrow monitoring, with proper warrants, should be both more effective and keep privacy advocates mostly happy."

Brian Burke, senior research analyst for Internet security at research firm IDC, told NewsFactor that new technologies are available to manage such monitoring in an effective manner.

"One area that comes to mind is the Secure Content Management market." Burke told NewsFactor. "SCM is a new market that reflects corporate customers’ need for an Internet management tool that controls Web content, e-mail scanning, virus protection, and downloadable applications execution. SCM products can be used to scan inbound and outbound messages for content such as terrorists plans and malicious code."

While the Internet can serve many uses in limiting or thwarting future incidents in the short term, its long-term application offers the most hope.

Richard Stiennon, research director for Internet security with Gartner, told NewsFactor that the terrorist groups targeting the United States and its allies are, on the whole, not technologically advanced despite their limited use of e-mail and other technologies.

He cites lack of education and wholesale illiteracy as overall reasons why these groups readily find legions of disaffected people willing to sacrifice themselves in terrorist actions.

However, Stiennon notes that many, himself included, have attributed the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the events at Tienamen Square in China more than a decade ago to the advent of fax machines and other means of rapid communication.

"Better education and higher literacy have the potential to lead to a more peaceful age," said Stiennon. "Perhaps our policy should be to get the Internet farther out into [these areas of conflict] so that people can have access to free information, [since it] has already proved to be a

liberating influence."

Two-Inch Computer Spy Keeps Tabs On Taps

A Chandler, Arizona-based startup says its KeyKatcher PC attachment -- a 2-inch-long plug -- can record 8 Kb to 64 Kb of keystroke data without requiring software or using any computer resources.

Aimed primarily at parents who want to monitor their childrens' computer activity, the KeyKatcher comes in three versions: an 8 Kb device for US$50, a 32 Kb model for $100 and a 64 Kb dongle for $150, product designer and seller Stephen Allen told TechExtreme.

The half-inch diameter KeyKatcher plugs into a PS/2 port between the keyboard and the computer and can be sealed with a piece of tamper-proof, heat-shrink tubing. The device does not work with USB ports, but older PCs with a 5-pin DIN connector can take the KeyKatcher with an adapter set.

Allen said that while some computer monitoring software is known to cause crashes, the KeyKatcher hardware is easily installed without any software and does not draw on PC resources.

"No system resources are needed," he said. "The KeyKatcher doesn't touch it."

Allen also touts the KeyKatcher's ability to be easily moved from one PC to another, taking with it up to 64,000 keystrokes -- about 32 pages of text -- with the 64 Kb version.

Once plugged in, the KeyKatcher uses a microcontroller to record keystrokes -- minus control characters that could "trigger undesired events to occur within the host program," usually a word processing or editing application. For that reason, Microsoft Notepad is recommended, the company says.

The data is stored in flash memory and can be viewed on the screen by typing in a password that the KeyKatcher will recognize. The flash memory ensures that data stays in tact and can be transferred to another computer or stored in place, Allen said.

When the password is correctly entered, a menu on the PC screen gives users several options, including View Memory, Erase Memory, Disable Recording and others.

"As soon as the View Memory option has been selected, every word that has been typed on your computer will be displayed for you to see," Allen's KeyKatcher description says.

Allen claims his product is better than blockers because kids cannot get around it through file sharing or by disabling it, adding that the device is aimed at getting parents to talk to children about their computer use.

"It doesn't restrict any access. It just looks at what they do," he said. "The KeyKatcher gets instant messaging, e-mail, Web addresses -- whatever activity -- it gets all of that stuff."

While not conducive to the corporate world because of its limited memory,

Allen said he is working on a "wrapping memory" model that will not fill up and should be available by the end of the year.

"Another market we're trying to hit is people who want to make sure other people aren't using their computer while they don't know about it," Allen said.

High Court Rejects Microsoft's Appeal

The U.S. Supreme Court on Tuesday rejected Microsoft Corp.'s request to overturn a ruling that the software giant violated U.S. antitrust laws, leaving the case in the hands of a lower court which has ordered settlement talks in the landmark case.

The high court declined without any comment or dissent to review the June 28 ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, which concluded Microsoft had illegally maintained its monopoly over the market for personal computer operating systems.

That appellate ruling sent the case back to the U.S. District Court where Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly has ordered intensive settlement talks between the government and Microsoft ahead of possible hearings in March to consider sanctions against the company.

Microsoft said on Tuesday it was disappointed by the Supreme Court decision but would move forward at the district court level and had no further plans to seek high court review at this time.

''We will have options after the next phase of the litigation if necessary," said Microsoft spokesman Jim Dessler.

The company had argued in its appeal to the Supreme Court that the original ruling in the case, handed down last year by District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson, was tainted because of Jackson's misconduct after the trial.

Jackson gave secret press interviews before issuing a sweeping ruling against the company. In the interviews, he derided Microsoft executives and compared them to common street criminals.

The appeals court sharply rebuked Jackson in its June ruling and reversed his order that Microsoft be split in two. But the appeals judges unanimously upheld Jackson's ruling that Microsoft holds a monopoly in the PC operating systems market and used illegal tactics to defend it.

In its subsequent appeal to the Supreme Court, Microsoft attorneys argued the appeals judges erred by refusing to throw out all of Jackson's conclusions.

The Justice Department countered that, under legal precedent, the appeals court was under no obligation to throw out Jackson's findings. The department also said that, since Microsoft may later appeal other portions of the case, granting a review now would lead to piecemeal review of the case.

Justice Department spokesman Gina Talamona said the government was ''pleased" with the Supreme Court's decision. "We'll continue our progress in the District Court."

One legal expert said the Supreme Court’s refusal to review the matter was expected. The appeal had appeared to be an effort by Microsoft to add some additional time before the district court proceedings could begin.

‘‘It would have been a big surprise if they (the Supreme Court) had granted review," said Howard University law professor Andrew Gavil.

Microsoft and the government are due to report on Friday to Kollar-Kotelly on the progress of their settlement talks. The judge has said a mediator will be appointed if there is no settlement deal by then.

If the two sides are still unable to settle by Nov. 2, Kollar-Kotelly has said she expects to hold hearings in March to determine what sanctions should be imposed on Microsoft to prevent future antitrust violations.

‘‘We continue to work in good faith but won’t comment on the settlement process," said Microsoft’s Dessler.

EU Says Microsoft Obstructed Probe

The European Commission has told Microsoft the firm obstructed the EU executive’s investigation of the software giant’s practices, a source familiar with the case said on Wednesday.

The allegations, reported in The Wall Street Journal on Wednesday, were contained in the formal statement of objections sent to the company in August.

A sanitized version of the document, with market-sensitive data deleted, was made more widely available about 10 days ago.

The document accused Microsoft of having sought to obstruct the Commission’s investigation by misleading those looking into the situation, according to the source.

The document said the company presented 34 letters from firms purportedly supporting Microsoft, which were either written by Microsoft itself or solicited without the companies being told what use Microsoft expected to make of them, the source said.

The Commission normally reduces fines when companies cooperate with its investigations and increases them when companies do not.

However, Competition Commissioner Mario Monti said on Wednesday it was premature to talk about the possibility of fining Microsoft since the case was at a preliminary stage.

Microsoft Denies It Tried to Hinder Inquiry

The Microsoft Corporation denied that it misled the European Commission in its antitrust investigation into the company.

The Wall Street Journal, citing a confidential European Commission

document outlining the case, reported that antitrust regulators might seek a large fine from Microsoft and demand that it drop some features from its Windows software. The report also said the commission contended that Microsoft misled investigators and sought to obstruct the case.

John Frank, a senior lawyer for Microsoft, said the article was incorrect. "We have done nothing to hinder the commission's investigation," he said. "We have cooperated fully."

Mario Monti, the European competition commissioner, acknowledged the leak of the document, the statement of objections sent by the commission to Microsoft at the end of August, but refused to comment on its contents.

The statement of objections is the starting point for an antitrust lawsuit brought by the commission. This one comes after a previous statement was issued in August 2000. The latest case combines previous accusations with new ones contending that Microsoft abused its dominant position in the operating system market.

Mr. Frank said Microsoft had been given until the first half of November to submit a written response to the accusations in this latest, extended lawsuit. "We needed a little extra time for logistical reasons," he said. He added that Microsoft had requested an oral hearing with European competition officials, which has been scheduled for Dec. 20 or 21.

According to the article in The Journal, the commission contended that Microsoft falsely presented 34 letters from companies purporting to support its case. In many cases the letters had been written by Microsoft or the companies were not aware they were to be used as evidence in the case, the commission said, according to the report.

Mr. Frank denied those allegations. "We have filed a great deal of information regarding what is taking place in the market," he said. "But there are no allegations in the statement of objections that these have been falsified."

Mr. Monti dismissed speculation in the article that the commission would fine Microsoft heavily. "To speak of a fine before Microsoft has even responded is premature," he said, adding that allegations in statements of objections can be narrowed by the time the commission makes its ruling.

That happened in the antitrust case against DaimlerChrysler, which was concluded today. Daimler was fined just less than 72 million euros, or $65.5 million, for price fixing and preventing its tied dealers from selling cars to customers from different European Union countries. Although it was the third-biggest fine ever imposed on a company by the commission, Mr. Monti said it was smaller than was initially envisioned.

"In the statement of objections sent in 1999, we had a preliminary view that DaimlerChrysler had a general strategy to block parallel trades in its cars," he said. "This could not be proven."

The commission said at the end of August that Microsoft might have violated European antitrust rules by using illegal practices to extend its dominant position in the market for personal computer operating systems into the market for low-end server operating systems. It also raised concerns about the bundling of Windows Media Player, which plays audio and video files, into the Windows 2000 operating system.

The latest statement of objections makes no reference to the latest

Microsoft operating platform, Windows XP. The commission's spokeswoman on competition issues, Amelia Torres, repeated today that the commission was not investigating Windows XP.

Microsoft, Government Discuss Mediator, Source Says

Attorneys for Microsoft and the government on Friday discussed the idea of appointing a mediator to settlement talks during a briefing with the judge overseeing the company's antitrust case, a source familiar the discussions said.

The subject of a mediator came up during an afternoon telephone conference call with U.S. District Court Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly, the source said.

Microsoft said in a statement that it had participated in the conference call but declined to discuss any details.

The U.S. Justice Department was not immediately available for comment and representatives of the 18 state attorneys general joining the federal government in the case declined comment.

The source familiar with the call said the judge told the parties not to divulge any details of the discussions.

Talks about a mediator suggest the two sides have no immediate prospect of settling the three-year-old case.

In ordering the parties last month into intensive settlement discussions, Kollar-Kotelly gave them until Oct. 12 to either come up with a settlement on their own, suggest a mediator or have her appoint one.

If the case still doesn't settle by Nov. 2, Kollar-Kotelly plans to hold hearings in March to consider appropriate sanctions against Microsoft to prevent future violations of U.S. antitrust law.

Settlement talks in 1998 failed to stop the launch of the landmark antitrust case against the software giant. A one-day effort during the trial in 1999 also failed, as did over four months of mediation by distinguished Chicago appeals court judge Richard Posner, that ended on April 1 of last year.

The case returned to the district court In August after a federal appeals court in June concluded that Microsoft had illegally maintained its monopoly over the market for personal computer operating systems.

Microsoft challenged the appeals court ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court but the high court announced on Tuesday it would not review the appellate decision.

The company had argued that the appeals court should have thrown out the original ruling in the case, handed down last year by District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson, because of Jackson's misconduct in talking to the media about the case.

The appeals court sharply rebuked Jackson and reversed his order that Microsoft be split in two. But the appeals judges unanimously upheld

Jackson’s ruling that Microsoft used illegal tactics to defend its monopoly.

More Companies Confirm MacExpo Attendance

Demon Internet, Eovia, MAG GBMH, RealViz and XYZ Digital Maps are the latest companies to confirm their attendance at MacExpo 2001, Europe’s only Mac show this year.

MacExpo is an event that features the latest in Macintosh products and solutions, including special areas for games and edutainment, developers, design and art, music and audio, and more. The show will be held at the Business Design Centre in London, Nov. 22-24.

"The MacExpo event is at a great time for us for sales in the run up to Christmas and the New Year," Gary Young, director of purchasing at Micro Anvika, said. "We want to use this fantastic opportunity to show the magnificent range of Apple products to as wide an audience as possible, including professionals and first time buyers and the UK’s national event is an emphatic way of showing this commitment."

Other companies already signed include Apple, Adobe, MicroSoft, Hewlett Packard, Sony, Macromedia, IBM, MacWarehouse, LaCie, Epson UK, Iomega UK and Microtek Europe. Free tickets are currently available through on-line registration.

Post-Napster File Sharing On the Rise

The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) may have won an empty victory in its court battle to rein in Napster’s file-sharing applications.

The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) may have won an empty victory in its court battle to rein in Napster’s file-sharing applications.

A new survey by Jupiter Media Metrix shows that while unique users of the Napster application plunged by nearly half -- 49 percent -- between March and August this year, users of file-swapping applications other than Napster increased by 492 percent.

In the period, unique U.S. visitors to the alternative applications rose to 6.9 million from 1.2 million, while Napster saw its traffic dwindle to 5.5 million from 10.8 million.

The upstarts singled out by Jupiter are led by Morpheus, with 2.3 million unique visitors in August, followed by Kazaa Media Desktop and Winmx, with 1.3 and 1.2 million unique visitors respectively.Aimster came in last with 927,000 users.

A similar suit shut Napster down and put a competing service, Scour, out of business. Still, the numerous types of second-generation file sharing applications are not likely to go away soon, said Jupiter analyst Mark Mooradian today. "After a latent period post-Napster, when people hadn’t heard of the alternatives, you didn’t see lots of growth," he said. "Now

we’re past that and in a phase when you see exponential growth like you saw with Napster early on."

He said the Kazaa and Morpheus networks’ strong growth now may invite still more growth later on.

"The way these things usually evolve, their value grows as their scale grows," Morradian said. "The more people sign on, the more breadth of content there is and the more bandwidth connections there are."

But that popularity is making them the next targets of the RIAA, which ealierr this month filed suit in U.S. federal court against the companies behind Morpheus, Kazaa and another service, Grokster.

But curbing their influence will be harder than it was for Napster because the new systems are file neutral and their architecture is more distributed, Mooradian said. "There’s no central index and you’re working off a distributed network where there’s many clients and servers."

House Relaxes Web Class Restrictions

The House voted Wednesday to make it easier for students to take classes over the Internet by relaxing restrictions on correspondence courses that can be taken without forfeiting federal aid.

Supporters of the bill, which passed 354-70, said it would expand educational opportunities for people who cannot take courses in traditional classroom settings.

‘‘Education is far ahead of us, and who is left behind are those who are economically disadvantaged yet academically qualified to attend higher institutions all over this country," said Rep. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga, sponsor of the bill.

The House defeated an amendment by Rep. Patsy Mink, D-Hawaii, that would have maintained stricter requirements for the number of instructional hours correspondence classes must provide and how college recruiters are compensated.

The bill:

- Allows some schools to offer more than half their classes by telecommunication. Under the Higher Education Act of 1998, schools that do this risk losing federal aid money.

- Cuts the number of instructional hours nontraditional programs must offer each week to be in line with the requirement for traditional classes. Nontraditional programs - such as distance learning courses - must offer at least 12 hours of instruction each week, while traditional programs have to provide one day of instruction.

- Clarifies and relaxes regulations on how colleges can compensate recruiters. Supporters of the bill say current rules - meant to protect students from misleading recruiting efforts - are confusing and have been applied inconsistently.

Mink said the bill, as passed, ‘‘endangers the stability and integrity of

the federal student financial aid programs."

But Rep. John Boehner, R-Ohio, said the bill would protect student aid money from being misspent or abused.

‘‘I believe that this legislation contains the necessary safeguards to ensure that Title IV student assistance funds are spent the way they are intended to benefit students and to serve the public interest," said Boehner, chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee.

Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., introduced a companion bill on Sept. 21.

The House bill is H.R. 1992.

The Senate bill is S. 1445.

On the Net:

Congress: http://thomas.loc.gov

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